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In Our View

A lot left riding on next year to fix school funding

By The Herald Editorial Board

The Legislature appears to have done all it's going to do this year to resolve the state's K-12 education funding crisis.

Last year the state Supreme Court imposed a \$100,000-a-day fine because the Legislature hadn't shown adequate progress in developing a plan to fully fund basic education and end the reliance on local school levies to pay a significant portion of the pay and benefits of teachers and other school district employees. It's a mandate that goes back to the [court's McCleary decision](#) in 2012.

With only a 60-day short session this year, the Legislature took the framework of a bipartisan committee called last summer by Gov. Jay Inslee to map out its work for next year. The House acted first, passing a bill that sets up a task force to resolve the levy problem, collective bargaining and other issues, using data gathered from school districts on teacher salaries and what school levies are funding. After toying with its own legislation that would have given the Legislature two years to complete a plan, the Senate this week signed on to the House bill.

Related legislation in response to the shortage of qualified teachers in the state remains under consideration. Both House and Senate passed bills that would require the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to draft a plan to attract more teachers, including a Senate plan to allow retired teachers to resume their careers without it affecting their pensions. But neither plan offers an increase in starting teacher pay that both Inslee and schools chief Randy Dorn requested.

Teachers, [Sen. Mark Miloscia told the Associated Press](#), don't enter the profession for the money, but for the love of working with kids. The problem is teachers are getting to work with kids and earning a higher salary for it in other West Coast states. Adjustments to teacher pay across the state are likely part of what the Legislature will be working on next year; providing a modest boost to the starting salaries of teachers offered a down-payment on that work and would have helped alleviate the shortages many schools now are facing.

Putting off a solution until next year hasn't made it any easier to solve, particularly in the face of the

[latest report from the state's Economic and Revenue Forecast Council](#). The state, the council reported, can expect about \$442 million less revenue during the 2017-19 budget cycle than it had anticipated. Republicans and Democrats still are divided about what the McCleary solution will cost in the end, but it appears less and less likely that the Legislature can fix this by searching for more tax loopholes to close.

We'll repeat our call for the Legislature to take a serious look at [state Treasurer Jim McIntyre's suggestion](#) to reform the state's tax system by reducing property taxes, the state sales tax and its business and occupation taxes and institute a flat 5 percent income tax, while tacking on a public vote on an amendment to the state Constitution that would impose a 60 percent supermajority of the Legislature to change major tax rates.

Assuming the governor signs off, the Legislature's plans will soon face review by the Supreme Court. Last year, even after lawmakers allocated \$2 billion to address student transportation and school supply needs and decrease K-3 class sizes, the court criticized the Legislature for not outlining a clearer plan to address McCleary.

As it was last year, what's been presented is more promise than solution.

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